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ABSTRACT

Cross-age teaching occurs when someone shares skills and knowledge with another person who is older or younger. Cross-age teaching of crime or substance abuse prevention skills by students can prevent or reduce crime. This bulletin contains suggestions for starting a cross-age teaching program through the following steps: (1) determine the focus; (2) find students; (3) research the subject; (4) develop lesson plans; (5) seek advice; and (6) practice. Tips to keep the program going, what to expect from program operation, and how to evaluate the program are discussed. (SLD)

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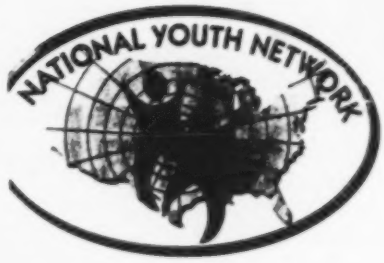

Youth in action

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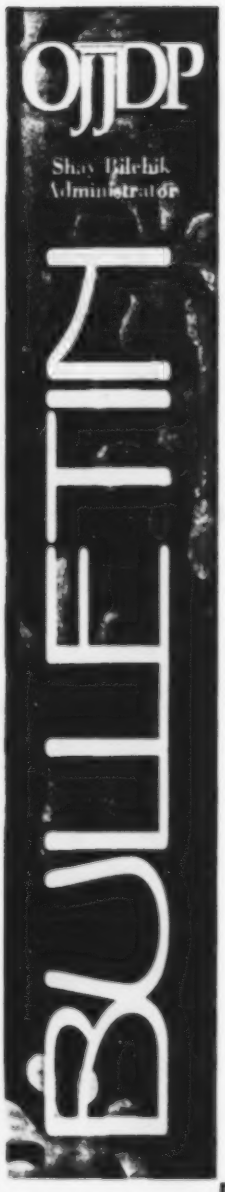

Cross-Age Teaching

What Is Cross-Age Teaching?

How would you like to be in the teacher's seat? Well, you can be through a cross-age teaching program. Cross-age teaching occurs when you share your skills and knowledge with persons who are either younger or older than you. Your students may be only slightly younger or older than you (like ninth graders or recent high school graduates). Or they may be significantly younger preschool, elementary, or middle school students, or even senior citizens. As a cross-age teacher, you may teach lessons by yourself to a class, as part of a group, or as a one-to-one tutor. Subjects can cover a broad spectrum, from crime and drug prevention to traditional academic subjects to special skills.

How Does Cross-Age Teaching Prevent or Reduce Crime?

Teaching crime and substance abuse prevention skills directly—such as how to resist peer pressure to use alcohol—clearly helps students learn about safe behaviors and avoid crime. Teaching academic subjects or providing training in special skills also indirectly helps prevent or reduce crime. By giving students one-to-one tutoring in subjects such as math or English, for example, cross-age teachers strengthen students' academic abilities, allowing them to improve performance, gain confidence, and experience success.

With these results, students may enjoy school a bit more and become more involved in their studies and school activities and less likely to drop out. Since dropping out of school is closely linked with getting involved in crime, staying in school is a key step in avoiding crime. If you are interested in obtaining more information on how dropping out of school is linked to getting involved in crime, get a copy of the Bulletin

from the administrator

Have you ever dreamt of being a teacher? Why not start now by organizing a cross-age teaching program—one in which you teach younger or older students. In cross-age teaching, your students may be elementary or middle school pupils, high school or college students, or senior citizens. As described in this Bulletin, the subjects you might teach run the gamut from traditional academic courses to crime prevention. Whatever subject you choose, cross-age teaching offers you a great opportunity to share your unique talents, skills, and knowledge!

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Keeping Young People in School: Community Programs That Work.[1]

Cross-age teaching programs that focus on learning skills like playing a sport, performing music, mastering a painting technique, or preparing a meal can also help reduce or prevent crime. Youth who are busy practicing guitar, playing in a soccer league, or creating artwork obviously have less time to get involved in crime or other dangerous activities than students with no special interests or activities.

What Will You Gain From Cross-Age Teaching?

Cross-age teaching programs can provide a sense of belonging to teaching volunteers or students who feel left out, lonely, or uncomfortable in large groups or traditional school environments. They also allow persons with special talents to share those abilities with others.

Students in your cross-age teaching program—whether learning about crime prevention, improving academic abilities, or mastering a new skill—will benefit too by gaining confidence and improved self-esteem. Their improved confidence and increased self-esteem, in turn, may make them less likely to commit crimes or abuse drugs.

By bringing together people of different ages, cross-age teaching may help eliminate—or at least reduce—stereotypes or misconceptions that people have about others who are older or younger than they are. Cross-age teaching also provides a great opportunity for everyone involved to learn about and appreciate the abilities, experience, and perspective of persons of different ages.

Programs that involve students who are much younger or much older than you will have added benefits. Youth who are teaching preschool or elementary school students, for example, will be able to serve as role models for children in need of guidance and advice. Cross-age teaching programs for senior citizens may help to eliminate or reduce misconceptions—or even fears—that seniors may have about young people in the community.[2]

Many youth across the country have already initiated successful cross-age teaching programs. In Barnwell, SC, for example, a group of high school students organized an antidrug training program for 11- to 14-year-olds in which they provided these younger students with antidrug information and taught them techniques for resisting peer pressure to use drugs. Drawing on their experiences, the Barnwell high school students imparted valuable information and at the same time served as role models for the younger students.

How Do You Start a Cross-Age Teaching Program?

Step 1: Determine Your Focus

Decide what age your students will be and what you want to teach them. While you may revise this initial decision, you need to start your program with a specific direction. Many youth like to teach younger children because they can relate well to them and may remember some of their own problems at that age. Younger

[1] Obtain a copy of this Bulletin, published by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention in June 1997, by calling the National Criminal Justice Reference Service (800–851–3420).

[2] For more information on the benefits of youth working with older citizens, refer to *Two Generations—Partners in Prevention*, a Youth in Action Bulletin available at no charge from the Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse, listed in the Resources section.

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children, in turn, usually look up to and admire teenagers, which gives you an excellent opportunity to teach effectively and serve as a strong role model.

Teaching older people can be rewarding too. Working with senior citizens, for example, you will gain new perspectives, make friends, and acquire a sense of history. Your older students will benefit too as you give them stimulating new skills to master and expose them to your energy, enthusiasm, and idealism.

Step 2: Find Students

After choosing a subject to teach and selecting the age group you would like to teach, you must find students. Talk with people who can help you reach the population that you're interested in—school principals, youth center managers, day care providers, nursing home administrators, and heads of senior citizen programs. Explain what you want to teach and why you think your program can help a particular age group. Propose a possible teaching schedule (with specific days and times) and identify possible facilities you can use for your program.

Step 3: Research Your Subject

Next, you'll need to do some research on your subject to make sure that you teach the most current and accurate information available. Talk with people who regularly teach that subject. Ask what resources—books, videotapes, brochures, Web sites—they use to update their knowledge. Ask experienced educators about teaching techniques that are particularly effective with the specific age group you have chosen to teach. Preschool teachers, for example, may be willing to meet with your group and explain how to conduct "show and tell" or a "sharing circle." High school or college teachers may offer tips on lecturing and group work or explain how to have students prepare and deliver PowerPoint presentations.

Step 4: Develop Lesson Plans

Now you're ready to develop lesson plans. For each teaching session, your lesson plan should identify and describe the following:

- Learning objectives (that is, what you want your students to understand or be able to do by the end of the lesson).
- Teaching methods—such as lecture, demonstration, small groups, or brainstorming—that you will use to meet your objectives.
- Key facts, pieces of information, or techniques that you need to convey.
- Materials, resources, handouts, and equipment you will need.
- Levels of performance that indicate success.

Planning a Successful Project

For more information on how to plan a successful project, see the National Youth Network's Planning a Successful Crime Prevention Project. *This 28-page workbook explains the five steps of the Success Cycle:*

- *Assessing Your Community's Needs.*
- *Planning a Successful Project.*
- *Lining Up Resources.*
- *Acting on Your Plans.*
- *Nurturing, Monitoring, and Evaluating.*

The workbook includes six worksheets for you to take notes on. You can get a copy of this planning workbook from the Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse, listed in the Resources section. Good luck!

Step 5: Seek Advice

Talk with experienced teachers. They may even be willing to provide sample lesson plans, critique your lesson plans, and provide advice on refining your presentation skills.

Step 6: Practice

Conduct practice teaching sessions with veteran teachers or group members playing the part of your students. Borrow a video camera, if possible, to tape the sessions. Watching and analyzing videotaped sessions is a great way to evaluate the effectiveness of both your lesson and your teaching style.

How Do You Keep the Program Going?

Make sure that all of your volunteers receive rewards from teaching. For example, design a survey or conduct discussions that allow teachers to receive feedback about what students learned and how much they enjoyed the sessions.

In securing feedback toward the end of your program, ask students specific questions like:

- What did you learn?
- What parts of the lesson were most helpful?
- What parts of the lesson were most enjoyable?
- Would you like the teacher to teach other subjects?
- What parts of the lesson were unclear or need improvement?

Make sure that students' responses are shared with everyone who helped in the teaching.

Making learning fun will also help keep your program going. Vary lesson plans and include activities that are enjoyable as well as instructive. Role-playing (in which students act out a scene to illustrate a point from your lesson), contests, small-group activities, debates, warm-ups, speeches, demonstrations, and similar interactive techniques can make learning more fun for everyone.

A great resource when planning lessons is the National Education Association's "Works 4 Me" Tips Library, located at www.nea.org/helpfrom/growing/works4me. This site offers useful tips on teaching techniques, classroom management, the use of technology in the classroom, and much more.

What Are Some of the Challenges You Will Face?

Finding enough time to plan and teach lessons, provide feedback to students, and evaluate your program will be among the biggest challenges you will face. Keeping up with students; updating lesson plans; grading papers; writing tests and quizzes; creating activities; and communicating with parents, teachers, and other community members involved in the program take more time than the actual instruction. Volunteers need to understand the significant time commitment required; it's important to support each other to make that commitment work.

Another ongoing challenge you will face is recruiting enough new teachers. Remember to recruit new teachers on a regular basis. Advertise your program in area high schools and youth centers. Have experienced members of your group train the newcomers.

You will also have to work on an ongoing basis to keep lessons fresh and interesting. Try relating your lessons to current events or popular performers to capture students' interest.

Maintaining energy and enthusiasm is a challenge for even the most experienced teachers.

Remember to tailor every lesson to the particular ages, interests, and abilities of the class. Teachers should meet periodically as a group and find out how others keep learning exciting and deal with classroom management issues and other concerns. Allow teachers to switch subjects or observe other teachers, when possible, to keep them interested in and excited about the program.

Finding program support—whether donations of teaching supplies, copying services, meeting space, or money—is an additional challenge for any cross-age teaching program. Although these programs are not expensive, extra supplies and other support can make the work easier for everyone involved.

What Are Some of the Rewards You Will Reap?

Any teacher will tell you that teaching's biggest reward is seeing the excitement of a student who has mastered a subject or skill. Serving as a role model for younger students or becoming a valued friend to older students also generates enormous positive feelings and helps renew volunteers' commitment to teaching.

Another reward is that, as a teacher, you will also learn. Teachers gain experience in understanding group dynamics, conflict management, collaboration, and problem solving—skills that come in handy later in life.

How Do You Evaluate Your Cross-Age Teaching Program?

Evaluating your project allows you to find out whether it has met its goals. Evaluation works, however, only if you decide up front what you want to evaluate and how you'll do so. The purpose of any evaluation is "to answer practical questions of decision-makers and program implementors who want to know whether to continue a program, extend it to other sites, modify it, or close it down."[1] When evaluating your cross-age teaching program, you will want to show that it does one or all of the following:

- Meets the specific learning objectives included in teachers' lesson plans.
- Helps improve students' academic performance.
- Helps eliminate or reduce stereotypes or misconceptions about younger or older persons in the community that teachers or students may have held prior to the program.
- Conveys valuable information to students, whether about crime prevention, academic subjects, or special skills.
- Allows teachers and students to appreciate the skills, viewpoints, and experiences of many people in the community.

Look at the number of students reached, the number of sessions taught, and the number of youth actively involved as teachers. Examine whether your students learned the information you sought to convey. You can determine what they learned by testing them (even through questions asked in the group) or by having them demonstrate their knowledge through role-playing or by creating artwork.

Ask students for feedback on your teaching. This will help you to improve your techniques. Find out whether key points were adequately explained, whether questions were fully answered, how students felt about the way information was presented, and what could have been done better.

In evaluating your cross-age teaching program, also consider whether and how it meets the following more general crime prevention goals:

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[1] National Crime Prevention Council, *What, me evaluate?* Washington, DC: National Crime Prevention Council, 1986.

- Reduces crime or fear of crime.
- Educates and informs a target audience.
- Is cost effective.
- Has a lasting impact.
- Attracts support and resources.
- Makes people feel safer and more positive about being a member of your school or community.

Be sure to include an evaluation step in your overall plan. Ask yourself what you can do better to reach your goals, to involve more people in your project, and to spread your message to a wider audience. Then, make adjustments to your activities to strengthen your project.

Learning to evaluate the things you do is a skill you can apply to all aspects of your life. Good luck with your project and—Enjoy teaching!

Resources

For more information, contact one of the following organizations or visit the U.S. Department of Justice Kids Page Web site at www.usdoj.gov/kidspage. This site includes information for kids, youth, parents, and teachers.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of America
National Headquarters
230 North 13th Street
Philadelphia, PA 19107–1510
215–567–7000
Internet: www.bbbsa.org

Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse (JJC)
P.O. Box 6000
Rockville, MD 20849–6000
800–638–8736
301–519–5212 (Fax)
Internet: www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org

Literacy Volunteers of America, Inc.
635 James Street
Syracuse, NY 13203–2214
315–472–0001

National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information (NCADI)
P.O. Box 2345
Rockville, MD 20847–2345
800–729–6686 or 301–468–2600
301–468–6433 (Fax)
Internet: www.health.org

National Crime Prevention Council
1700 K Street NW., Second Floor
Washington, DC 20006–3817
202–466–6272
202–296–1356 (Fax)
Internet: www.ncpc.org

The National Mentoring Partnership
1400 I Street NW.
Washington, DC 20005
202–729–4340
202–729–4341 (Fax)
Internet: www.mentoring.org

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The National Youth Network, founded and managed by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, consists of diverse youth leaders from across the Nation who are sponsored by youth-serving organizations. The goal of the Network is to recognize and build upon the power and importance of youth leadership by uniting young people and adults, through communication and action, to enable youth organizations and nonaffiliated youth to have a positive, formidable impact in our communities and throughout our Nation.

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention is a component of the Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Assistance, the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, and the Office for Victims of Crime.

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